

L8 AL KATRUN – MADAMA**1388km**

October 2004; Nissan Patrol 2.8D (José Brito)

Description

This piste is used by smugglers and convoys of trucks packed with sub-Saharan migrants trying their luck in Libya or possibly Europe. The ambience of Al Katrun reflects these activities and there are reports of robberies on the outskirts of town. Thus, some discretion should be used when talking about your destination and whereabouts. Mohammed Tager of the Wadi Alhikma agency runs a camping ground in the old Italian fort on a small hill opposite the police headquarters. He organizes the paperwork efficiently for the passports (10LD) and car (5LD), trips through the area and also arranges guides in your car (800LD) or in their own car (1200LD) to Niger or Chad. Nevertheless, at least for Libya, there is no need for a guide as the piste is mostly clearly visible. The Libyan checkpoints can be a hassle, especially at KM126 and 249. In the later, Libyans inspect the Mercedes trucks filled with migrants, thus confusion and bribery are common.

This piste runs about 60km west of the main piste marked in the 1:500,000 Russian F-33A (Tummu) map. The piste runs mostly south and the first 180km are very sandy. Afterwards and until KM249 the piste crosses several plateaux alternated with floodplains and canyons. From this waypoint until Madama, the piste is firm and fast, crossing plains with the Tummu and Mangueni escarpments clearly visible to the east and west, respectively.

The Libyans are building a **paved road** from Al Katrun to Tummu, with construction underway from Tummu, thus the description until KM293 will become obsolete in a year or so.

Route findings and marks

Until KM22 there are lots of tracks, but just head for the next waypoint zigzagging between the palm trees. Afterwards, the piste is clearly visible all the way to Madama. Although markers are scarce, there are a few tyres and small concrete blocks after Tummu. In the plateau areas the piste tends to diverge into multiple tracks.

Fuel

Al Katrun and Tajarhi, although the latter might be irregular. If needed, Libyans might sell fuel expensively at the checkpoints. A fuel station is being built in Tummu.

Water

Al Katrun and Tajarhi. There are also wells and reservoirs in the Libyan checkpoints and at Madama.

Traffic

Until the Libyan checkpoint at KM274, traffic is mostly irregular. In one of the previous checkpoints, Libyans claimed that they had never seen tourists using this piste. After this checkpoint, there are plenty of trucks circulating.

Driving

The first 22km were made zigzagging through a dune field with palm trees. Afterwards the piste is firm until the Libyan checkpoint at KM79. Before arriving to the checkpoint it is advisable to deflate tires and use low range if you are

in an overloaded vehicle. From this checkpoint until the checkpoint at KM126 the piste is flat but very sandy. After the checkpoint, the piste is firmer but there are several patches of soft sand until KM182. Afterwards, the piste is firm and with several rocky areas, thus it's best to reinflate tyres. After KM249 the piste is firm and fast with occasional patches of soft sand.

Suggested duration

Depending on the checkpoints, this piste can be done in one long day. If an overnight stop is needed, then the most scenic part is between KM228 and 233.

0km (388)	N24° 53.3'	E14° 31.4'	224 (164)	N23° 10.3'	E13° 47.5'
Wadi Alhikma agency. Old Italian fort. Head south, through the main road.			Heading Sover rocky plateau.		
10 (378)	N24° 48.9'	E14° 30.1'	228 (160)	N23° 08.4'	E13° 48.1'
Exit of dump area, cross dune field heading SE			End of plateau with a floodplain followed by an ascent into a canyon.		
22 (366)	N24° 43.4'	E14° 32.7'	233 (155)	N23° 05.8'	E13° 48.9'
Clear piste.			Stick cairn. Exit of canyon, heading SSE.		
48 (340)	N24° 30.8'	E14° 27.5'	242 (146)	N23° 01.8'	E13° 52.0'
Car wreck. Head SW.			End of floodplain by a small rock and sandy pass. Terrain rocky with patches of soft sand. Do not deflate tyres, use 4WD.		
67 (321)	N24° 23.1'	E14° 20.5'	249 (139)	N22° 58.6'	E13° 53.8'
Point on piste.			End of rock and sandy area onto firm and fast plain.		
76 (312)	N24° 20.0'	E14° 16.3'	259 (129)	N22° 54.3'	E13° 56.3'
Entering Tajarhi. Fuel in village centre.			Two small hills. Head SSE		
79 (309)	N24° 19.1'	E14° 15.4'	274 (114)	N22° 47.7'	E14° 01.3'
Libyan checkpoint in very sandy area. Deflate tyres before checkpoint			Libyan checkpoint. Mercedes trucks with migrants are checked here.		
108 (300)	N24° 04.4'	E14° 12.4'	293 (95)	N22° 39.1'	E14° 05.4'
Very soft sand, slow going.			Tummu. Libyan checkpoint. End of paved road from Al Katrun. Exit checkpoint heading south over a firm and fast piste.		
126 (262)	N23° 56.0'	E14° 07.9'	314 (74)	N22° 30.3'	E14° 01.0'
Libyan checkpoint. Piste less sandy but keep tyres deflated.			Fast and firm piste, heading SW.		
185 (203)	N23° 27.7'	E14° 00.6'	343 (45)	N22° 16.1'	E13° 53.5'
Piste firm with occasional patches of soft sand. In one km piste ascends onto a plateau. Reinflate tyres.			Small concrete cube marked with '61'. Piste continues firm with occasional patches of soft sand. Head SW.		
195 (193)	N23° 23.5'	E13° 55.3'	373 (15)	N22° 04.3'	E13° 42.4'
Firm piste over rocky plateau. Piste diverges into multiple tracks, head SW.			Piste continues firm with occasional patches of soft sand. Head SW.		
205 (183)	N23° 19.4'	E13° 52.1'	388 (0)	N21° 56.8'	E13° 38.8'
Exit of rocky area into plain. Occasional patches of soft sand. Heading SW.			Madama. Military fort. Mercedes trucks with migrants are checked at this point.		
213 (175)	N23° 16.0'	E13° 49.0'			
Tyre marker. Fast plateau piste.					